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ISSN: 0160-9645. SUGGESTED ABBR.: *AncW*

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THE ANCIENT WORLD is a quarterly journal dedicated to original research in Classical Studies, especially in Archaeology, History, Epigraphy, Numismatics, Geography and Topography.

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Application to mail at Second Class postage rates is pending at Chicago, IL.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE ANCIENT WORLD, 7020 N. Western Ave., Chicago, IL 60645-3416.

Titus Didius and His Macedonian Praetorship

T. Didius has been called "a man of no history."¹ The son of T. Didius — the First, for our purpose of inquiry — Tribune of the Plebs in 143 B.C. and author of the Lex Didia,² Didius the younger brought noble status to his family by entering the office of Consul as a novus homo in 98 B.C. As consul together with Q. Caecilius, he took steps against demagoguery by ending the inclusion of unconnected proposals in a single bill³ and by requiring a specific time period to pass from the announcement of a bill to its passage.⁴ The following year (97 B.C.) Didius became Proconsul in Nearer Spain.⁵ While at war with the Celtiberi he is said to have killed 20,000 of the Arecaci after destroying Colenda and moving the population of Termes.⁶ In 93 B.C. he celebrated the second triumph of his career — about the first I will speak of shortly — this time as Proconsul *ex Hispania de Celtibereis*.⁷ Having served under the Consul L. Iulius Caesar⁸ and probably under Cato and Sulla he without doubt represented "the cream of the military experience at the disposal of the state."⁹ His life, it appears, ended on June 11, 89 B.C. after the capture of Herculaneum.¹⁰

As I mentioned earlier Didius had two triumphs to his credit. The first was *ex Macedonia* (99 B.C.) and the second *ex Hispania* (93 B.C.). While his deeds in Spain are well preserved in the narratives of the ancient authors the description of his stay in Greece is incomplete and therefore unsatisfactory.

We do know that the closing decades of the second century B.C. had brought the Scordisci into the Balkans and that in 114 B.C. the same tribe defeated C. Porcius Cato¹¹ and thus became able to march south and sack Delphi. Rome responded by sending several able commanders, one of whom, M. Minucius Rufus, won a victory over the Scordisci and their Thracian allies, the Bessi in 107 B.C.¹²

Ammianus Marcellinus tells us that Drusus' campaign confined the barbarians within their own bounds¹³ while Minucius Rufus, who came later, defeated them near the Hebrus River.¹⁴ Having assumed command of the troops in Macedonia in 101 B.C., Didius must have met in battle with these tribes in the area the latter were forced to occupy by Rufus, namely the lands around the Hebrus River, between the mountains Haemus and Rhodope. My conclusion is verified by the fact that this particular victory opened the way for the Romans toward the Black Sea, for immediately afterwards the Roman fleet took possession of the towns situated on the Bosporus and the Propontis.¹⁵ With this information in mind, it does not make sense to place the Scordisci and their allies anywhere north

1. *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. IX, p. 173.

2. *Macrob. Sat.* 3.17.6.

3. *Cic. Dom.* 53.

4. *Cic. Dom.* 41; *Sest.* 135; *Phil.* 53; *Leg.* 311; the period being three nundinae.

5. *Liv. Per.* 70.

6. *Sall. Hist.* 1.88; *Liv. Per.* 70; *Plut. Sert.* 3.3.

7. *Cic. Planc.* 61.

8. *Cic. Font.* 43.

9. *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. IX, p. 188.

10. *Ovid Fasti*, 6.567.

11. *Lov. Per.* 63; *Flor.* 1.39.4; *Dio* 26; *Ruf. Fest. Brer.* 9.1; *Amm. Marc.* 27.4.4.

12. *Liv. Per.* 65.

13. *Amm. Marc.* 27.4.10.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

of the Haemus or anywhere west of the Rhodope. The rich valley of the Hebrus River was obviously their home after their defeat in 107 B.C., as was the place in which Didius later overran them.

In the following passage not only does Florus summarize the events that concern us, but also offers us in the midst of chronological confusion a vital piece of information. The text reads:

The Thracian War. After the Macedonians, the Thracians rebelled and, not content with making incursions merely into the neighbouring provinces of Thessaly and Dalmatia, penetrated as far as the Adriatic; . . . The cruellest of all the Thracians were the Scordisci and to their strength was added cunning as well; . . . An army therefore was not only routed and put to flight by them — what almost seemed like a miracle — entirely cut up under a Cato. Didius, finding them wandering, drove them back into their own land of Thrace. Drusus forced them still further and prevented them from recrossing the Danube. Minucius laid waste all the country along the Hebrus, losing however many of his men as they rode across a river covered with ice.¹⁶

Florus is obviously in error here, for Drusus and Minucius came before Didius. However, since prior to their last defeat (in 107 B.C.) the Scordisci and the Bessi were already, as Florus says, prevented from crossing the Danube by Drusus,¹⁷ we can once again narrow down their base of operation to the area between the rivers Danube and Hebrus.

A reconstruction of the events that led to the destruction of these tribes at the hands of Didius' army, in their proper sequence, would be as follows:

The Scordisci, the Bessi and the other tribes of the area defeat Cato in 114 B.C. and so descend southward toward the waters of the Aegean and eastward toward the Black Sea. Their advance is checked by Drusus in 111 B.C., who manages to push them beyond the Danube. A few years later the same tribes are on the move again, laying the area south of the Haemus in ruin until Minucius succeeds in 107 B.C. to push them beyond the Hebrus River. One final time they cross the Hebrus, find their way through the Acontisma pass into Macedonia¹⁸ and proceed south to Thessaly until news of the arrival of a Roman army makes them retreat north to the valley of Hebrus, between Rhodope and Haemus, where they are caught up and defeated by Didius in 101 B.C.

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16. Florus 39 (Loeb Classical Library), tr. Edward Foster.

17. Proconsul in 111 B.C.; Flor. 1.39.5; Amm. Marc. 27.4.10; Liv. Per. 63.

18. Amm. Marc. 26.7.12; 27.4.8.

APPENDIX I

Two inscriptions have been found, one in Delphi and another in Cnidos¹ containing a Greek translation of a Roman law relating to the suppression of piracy in the eastern Mediterranean, in which T. Didius is mentioned as conqueror of the *Caenice Chersonessos*.

The Delphi text was originally restored as: εὐ[θύς, ὅταν εἰς ἀρχὴν εἰσέλθῃ, εἰς Θρά]ικην, ἧς Τίτος Δεῖδιος ἡγούμενος ἐκράτησεν, while the inscription from Cnidos records: εὐθυ]ς εἰς Χερσόνησον Καίνεικην τε ἦν Τίτο[ς Δεῖδιος] πολέμων δορίκτητον ἔλαβεν. As a result of this discovery in Cnidos the Delphi text was revised as: εὐ[θύς πρὸς Χερσόνησον Καίνε]ικην, ἧς Τίτος Δεῖδιος ἡγούμενος ἐκράτησεν.

Strabo tells us that "near the outlet of the Hebrus which has two mouths lies the city Aenus, on the Melas Gulf; then comes Cape Sarpedon; then what is called the Thracian Chersonessos, which forms the Propontis and the Melas Gulf and the Hellespont."²

We know that in A.D. 275 the emperor Aurelian on his way to conduct a campaign against the Persians stopped at the town of Caenophrurium in Eastern Thrace, where he fell victim to a conspiracy. Caenophrurium, as its name suggests, guarded Caenice, being situated near the region's eastern borders.⁴ Strabo's "Thracian Chersonessos" is obviously the chersonessos that Caenophrurium was built to protect, that of Kallipoli.

The inscribed texts from Cnidos and Delphi, together with Strabo's comments, support my conclusion that T. Didius not only defeated the Scordisci and their allies in the Hebrus valley between the mountains Rhodope and Haemus, but that he also proceeded to conquer the lands east of the Hebrus River up to the Black Sea.

1. For the Delphi inscription, see SEG III 378, and the commentary by Jones in *JRS* 16 (1926), 155-173. On the Cnidos inscription see Hassal, Crawford and Reynolds, "Rome and the Eastern Provinces at the End of the Second Century B.C." *JRS* 64 (1974) 195-220.

2. Book VII, fragment 51 (Loeb Classical Library) tr. Horace Leonard Jones.

APPENDIX II

I have located several maps, such as the one reprinted below from the Loeb edition of *Ammianus Marcellinus*, Volume III (books 27-31), on which the Scordisci are placed to the north of Illyricum. Perhaps they have been so created after the supposition that at the time of Cato's defeat in 114 B.C. Didius was praetor of Illyricum. That hypothesis is very much mistaken, because we do not know of any war at Illyricum at that time which might have required the presence of a praetor, nor can we dismiss Cicero, who clearly states that Didius triumphed *ex Macedonia*. Furthermore, we learn from the chronicle of Eusebius¹ that Didius defeated the Scordisci one year after the fifth consulship of C. Marius.²



1. CLXX 2.

2. First consulship 107; second 104; third 103; fourth 102; fifth 101.